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ARTICLE REFERENCES

The Misfit Economy
Philippe Silberzahn
Relationship Economy
eXpedition

Lift 2014: Fringe Innovation

This year's Lift event celebrated collective creativity and the power of counter culture to kickstart innovation.

SUMMARY

INNOVATING ON THE FRINGE Companies in the mainstream have a lot to learn from fringe players such as patent robbers, hippies and hermits. The challenge is to create a safer space for misfits to work in existing economies.

A NEW LANGUAGE We need a new language to communicate with consumers – and perhaps we shouldn't be calling them consumers in the first place.

NO MORE SILOS There shouldn't be a neat line between an innovation division and the rest of the company. Top executives are not the only creative members of the team.

CREATIVE BREAKDOWN Many speakers analysed the breakdown of creativity. In big companies, the problem often comes down to the shift in power from the creative majority to the controlling minority, according to Philippe Silberzahn, an associate professor.



Lift's famous fondue night

The Power of Counter Culture

Companies in the mainstream have a lot to learn from fringe players, argued Alexa Clay, co-author of [The Misfit Economy](#). Those fringe players could be patent robbers, hippies or even hermits living off the grid – "isolation plays a huge role in innovation," she explained. The challenge is to create a safer space for misfits to work in existing economies.

"We need new soft skills to go against the command-and-control model of capitalism that has been driving society for so long," said Clay. She added that we also need new networks that go beyond the weak ties of the nuclear family and LinkedIn, the social network for professionals. That need will become more pronounced as more and more people migrate to an informal economy of work.

David Pescovitz, co-editor of the Boing Boing website, also looked to counter culture for inspiration. He suggested that virtual reality could be used as a tool to empower individuals to shift their perceptions of reality. "New kinds of digital synaesthesia are emerging that temporarily rewire the brain," he said, referencing a series of immersive computer experiences. See [Colour & Music: Visualising Sensation](#) for examples of music videos that uncover the connections between sight and sound.



David Pescovitz

Reversing Creative Decline

[Philippe Silberzahn](#), an associate professor at Emylon Business School in Lyon, spoke on the breakdown of creativity in big companies. Although most CEOs claim they want to innovate, the average CEO spends 30% of their time controlling themselves and others, Silberzahn noted. That lost time equals wasted creativity. And when the creative majority is replaced by a controlling minority that favours best practices over innovation, idea rot sets in.

The good news is that no decline is irreversible, said Silberzahn. However, companies first need to recognise the difference between creativity and innovation: the former is a trait, while the latter is a social process, Silberzahn explained. They must then jettison the idea that there should be a neat line between an innovation division and the rest of the company. The top executives are not the only creative members of the team, Silberzahn added.



Innovation has to be collective: it has to be completely connected to the corporation.

PHILIPPE SILBERZAHN, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, EMYLON BUSINESS SCHOOL



You Can't Be Serious? Lego workshop

A New Language

Jerry Michalski, founder of global think-tank [Relationship Economy eXpedition](#) (REX), argued that we need a new language to communicate with consumers – and we shouldn't be calling them consumers in the first place. "To consume is to destroy, often wastefully," he explained, arguing that the rhetoric of marketing is broken – why not person, individual, customer, client or guest, instead of consumer?

The way we use language becomes even more important when approaching concepts such as big data. Michalski asked companies to consider whether they were using big data to stalk or to serve, and whether they were mining or minding the creative commons. "Vocabulary matters," said Michalski. "Change your language if you can." His advice to companies was to develop a positive working culture, rather than the perfect brand image.



Jerry Michalski



The language of marketing is the language of war: we are busy attacking the people we want to trust us.

JERRY MICHALSKI, FOUNDER, RELATIONSHIP ECONOMY EXPEDITION

FUTURE INSIGHTS

DEVELOP SOFT SKILLS "We need new soft skills to go against the command-and-control model of capitalism that has been driving society for so long," says Alexa Clay, co-author of *The Misfit Economy*.

REWIRE WITH VIRTUAL REALITY Use virtual reality as a tool to shift your perceptions of the world. "New kinds of digital synaesthesia are emerging that temporarily rewire the brain," says Boing Boing's David Pescovitz.

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE Often, the rhetoric of marketing is broken. Tread carefully when referring to consumers – why not person, individual, customer, client or guest, instead of consumer?

COLLECTIVE INNOVATION Innovation has to be collective: it has to be completely connected to the company.